Teaching Farmers How to Perform Fecal Floatations and Fecal Egg Counts in Their Herds

The largest challenge for small ruminant producers in the southeastern United States is parasites. Parasites cause huge production losses for sheep and goat farmers in the state of Kentucky. Managing parasites is complex and requires many different strategies. In Kentucky, there is a shortage of veterinarians to assist farmers with fecal floatations and fecal egg counts. Most veterinary clinics perform fecal floatation testing for approximately $18-25 per sample, which can become very costly over time.

Doing fecal egg counts can also reveal which animals within a herd are more genetically vulnerable and require treatments. Identifying and treating parasites correctly prevents weight loss, which is important in meat animals sold by the pound, and decreases the number of deaths. To address these concerns, Cooperative Extension at Kentucky State University hosted several educational programs that help farmers understand the latest information on internal parasites. The workshops helped farmers with preventing diseases by improving education on preventative care while striving to enhance animal welfare throughout the state and help communication and relationships between producers and Cooperative Extension.

Educational lectures were given on all aspects of animal health, such as proper nutrition and animal care, and the importance of immune support and prevention of all diseases. During these hands-on labs, farmers were able to bring in samples and perform a test with the KSU Extension veterinarian to learn how to perform the tests themselves on multiple microscopes. Over 80 farmers have already participated in the animal health program. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual Extension programs have been created for teaching farmers how to conduct fecal floatations and fecal egg counts remotely. Images of the labs were taken through the HDMI microscope and then broadcasted with images and videos through zoom and Facebook watch party reaching over 300 additional viewers.

As a result of the workshops, small ruminant producers in Kentucky have been able to learn how to do fecal egg counts themselves while at their farm and have reduced the cost of fecal testing and monitoring, which saves producers a significant amount of money and has decreased production losses and increased overall farm profitability.